

## [Capt. John R. Hughes]

VeraElliott, [P. W?]., El Paso, Texas.

District [?] 20. 979 Words.

Elliott, P. W.

JOHN R. HUGHES,

Texas Ranger Captain. Folk Custom Interview (?) [Editorial?]

File No. 240.

979-Words.

Capt. John R. Hughes, captain of the Texas Rangers, oldest ex-ranger captain in Texas, has served 28 years as a Texas Ranger. Born in Cambridge, Ills., John Hughes went to the Indian Territory and learned Indian ways among the Indians of the Osage Nation. He talks low, smiles easy, doesn't drink, smoke or gamble—a courtly old man with white hair and beard.

He talked of a time, when, merely to ride the trails and live was a daily miracle. But Captain Hughes will not let you believe in that from his conversation. As a young man he caught wild horses onh on his ranch, a start toward independence. When horse thieves drove off most of them, he followedt followed the thieves month after month, overtook them and recovered his property. This led to his enlistment with the Texas Rangers, under Capt. Frank Jones, August 10, 1887.

The following year, officials of the Frontier mine. , State of Coahuila, Mexico, asked Captain Jones to send three good men to their mine, so John Hughes, Walter Durbin and

## Library of Congress

Bass Outlaw, later killed in El Paso, quit the service May 17, 1889, to spend six months guarding silver bullion in transfer from the mine to the railroad, 160 miles away.

Mexican [banditry?] is a business handed down often from father to son, a blend of soldier, convict, with native Indian, reported as smarter than Mexican sired by the devil. And bandits infested this region. There were only two settlements on the road, La Vahia ranch, and a little Mexican town at the foot of Santa Rosa Mountains, called [?] Santa Rosa. But for those six months Captain Hughes smiles and fails to remember any unusual happenings. [C - 12. Texas.?] 2 The three men re-enlisted in the same Texas Ranger company in 1889, and, from then on, Captain Hughes followed the Ranger trail. He was stationed near Uvalde, at Camp Leona, nine miles southeast on the Leona river. Fifteen men who formed the company camped at a fine [?] spring at old Camp Woods in a canyon, during the winter and spring of 1890. Their duty was to guard against cattle and horse thieves, and later, in March, Captain Hughes was left in charge of two men, [?] (detachment), with orders to move to [Marfa?].

Then followed three years in Presidio county, serving as a silver bullion guard for the Shafter mine. (a mine so rich the owners did not want the public public to know about it.) This mine operated continuously for 50 years. The mining company liked the Ranger guards. Their silver was safe in transportation from the mine to Marfa, as well as the payroll carried on the return trip back to the mine.

The silver was carried in hacks, or stages, two guards inside, six on horse-back, requiring three days for the distance of [?] 50 miles.

Bandits of the district know when the pay-roll came in, but, according to Captain Hughes, they had no trouble, were never attacked. However, a story is told of three white crosses which were placed near the Shafter mine in [Smugg?] [Smugglers'?] Trail—a warning that smuggling [?] did not pay while the Rangers [?] rode the district. Reports of the [Adjutant?] General show that Captain Hughes had a hobby never to lose a battle or let

## Library of Congress

a prisoner escape. The Rangers in State government employ were given some money, issued rations, a fine horse, guns, saddle and bedding roll. One pack mule, to four men, so a blanket a-piece, slicker and saddle blankets sufficed winter and summer. 3 Captain Hughes and his men killed deer for meat, but he states he was never a hunter and would not allow his men to kill ruthlessly. Wild animal life abounded in the early days, and panthers roamed a thirty mile strip between Sierra Blasco and the Rio Grande.

The Mexican ranchers could not raise colts, for a panther's favorite meat is horse-flesh. They are cowardly, never attack men unless driven in a corner. Two of the Rangers under Captain Hughes camped for the night half way between Marfa and Shafter, in 1890. They made their beds on pine needles and hobbled the horses so they could graze.

While the men slept a panther attacked one of the horses, a fine animal, 15 hands high. He was so active and strong, he threw the panther off, but a large claw mark and a bite in the animal's [?] neck remained as evidence of a mighty battle in which the horse was victorious. [?]

Guarding the Shafter Mines' payroll was a responsible undertaking. They [money?] always came by express on the train to Marfa, then was transferred to the express box of the stage. Once when the money was late, the man in charge of the stage said: "Hughes, [ou?] our money failed to show up. I'll have to leave you here until it comes in. It is due at 9 p.m. You will take the money by horse-back, leaving immediately, traveling all night to reach Shafter by morning."

The other guards did not know of the arrangement. They put the express box on the stage in the usual manner, and started off. Captain Hughes reported he had been subpoenaed to court in Marfa and kept quiet. When the train came in from the west he received about \$9,000 in currency, placed it in a "[marale?]" tied on the saddle horn and started on 4 double quick time for Shafter.

## Library of Congress

The November night was cold in an altitude of 4,000 feet, and Captain Hughes said: "When a person gets cold the saddle begins to slip. I got so sleepy I was afraid I might fall, as the horse was not my own, and not so gentle. So I turned off the road, got down and took off the saddle and blanket, lying in a coil of [?] rope so if the horse moved I would wake up. I put the money around my shoulders, placing it on the opposite side from my pistol.

"Deciding I could sleep an hour, I looked at my watch, put my head on the saddle and went to sleep. I woke up, saddled up and found I had slept exactly ten minutes. The remainder of the ride was made easily and the money was delivered in the morning." This ability to sleep lightly remains with Captain Hughes. He has driven a Model T car for [12?] years and claims it runs better than ever. He still pulls to the side of the road to sleep a few minutes, while driving.

Captain Hughes led the Sun Carnival parade on New Year's Day, 1936, at El Paso, Texas. Vera Elliott 40 110 Locust St El Paso, Texas.